

# Setting Fitness Goals

**T**he most important part of developing a personal plan for physical fitness is knowing why you want to become more fit. As simple as that may sound, it is actually a critical aspect of a successful fitness plan. If your goal is weight loss, you'll approach fitness somewhat differently than if your goal is building strength and endurance. And once you know why you want to become more fit, you can more easily determine what you can do to reach that goal.

## Setting Long-Range Goals

Be specific. Sit down with paper and pencil and jot down exactly what you hope to accomplish by becoming more physically fit. If your goal is to lose weight, how much? If you want to improve your endurance, how will that help you? If you wish to improve specific skills (your bicycling, swimming or golf game, for instance), state them. Knowing what you want in the long run will help you tailor your program to achieve your ends and provide motivation.

## Setting Working Goals

If your long-range goal is to lose 15 pounds, start by setting short-range "working" goals—small steps that will help you reach your long-range wish. Working goals specify what, how much, when and how often you will do an activity that helps you move toward your final goal. For instance, a working goal might be to attend a one-hour exercise class after work on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Each time you attend a class, you've met one working goal. If your ultimate goal is to increase the amount of weight that you can bench-press, your working goals will center around progressively "overloading" your muscles until you can build up to the desired weight.

## Keeping a Planner

The best way to outline working goals—and to make your fitness plan a firm commitment—is to keep a planner. Write down the activities you will do, which days you will do them on, and when and how long you will do them. It's best to space similar workouts at least 24 hours apart to allow for adequate recovery time. If you exercise using high-impact aerobics on Monday, wait until Wednesday to repeat that activity. On Tuesday, you might engage in strength training, flexibility exercises or a low-impact workout, such as swimming or bicycling. For optimum results, exercise vigorously three to five times a week. When you've accomplished each goal, take a minute to write a comment or two on how you felt afterward. Did you feel a sense of accomplishment? Have you noticed that you're exercising with greater ease than when you first started? Did eating lunch before your workout affect your performance? Keep notes about your progress and use this information both to analyze any problems you may be having and to award your achievement.

## The Payoff

Long-range goals can be easy to lose sight of. That's why working goals and planners are important. By writing down what you hope to accomplish and setting well planned working goals, you'll find that the payoff isn't the "impossible dream," it's the final, inevitable, successful result of a series of hard-earned achievements.

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